

## Woodward-Granger Community School District



*On Leadership . . .*

*"Teachers are very much involved in the process. There are many strong teacher leaders who have been given to opportunity as well as the responsibility to lead department groups, teams, etc."*



### Initial Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

#### A. Description of Districts

The Woodward-Granger Community School District serves 659 students in one elementary school (K-5) located in Granger, one middle school (grades 6-8) and high school (9-12) located in Woodward, and Grandwood School (serving the needs of severely disabled students). In the last two years, this district has experienced an increase in enrollment. Approximately 18% of the district's students receive free or reduced lunch and 22% receive special education services.

- A. About the Districts
- B. Applying the Operating Principles
- C. Professional Development Cycle
- D. Observations About the Site Visit

Approximately 30 teachers work in the district. In the Elementary building the student population consists of 311 students. The Middle/High School serves 128 students in grades 7-12 in seven sections, and the High School serves 237 students.

Woodward Granger school district also includes Grandwood School which is an alternative school setting for approximately 30-40 students ranging in age from 13-21. Many of these students live in homes at the Woodward Resource Center. According to a district report, the larger percentage of students receiving special education is primarily attributed to the fact that Grandwood is a part of the district.

#### Site Visit

Department of Education staff visited Woodward Granger Elementary School and the Middle School/High School on October 27, 2005. The principal of the Elementary (Dianne ~ ) and the Middle School/High School (Delane ~ ), the superintendent (Jody ~ ), and the director of curriculum/instruction (Pam ~ ) were interviewed. The building leadership teams for both schools were interviewed, as well as individual teachers assigned to teach various grade levels and content areas. Classroom visits were conducted in both buildings to look for application of the practices being learned in professional development (PD).

*Note: Building and student photos from [www.woodward-granger.k12.ia.us/hsms.htm](http://www.woodward-granger.k12.ia.us/hsms.htm)*

Grandwood School personnel were included in the interviews but this case study will feature the elementary and the middle school/high school. For information about professional development of Grandview contact the school principal, Julie ~.

## B. Iowa Professional Development Model: The Operating Principles

### Focus on Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Interviews and the review of district and building plans suggest that this district has a clear and explicit focus on instruction and improving student achievement through professional development. The PD target for grades 6-12 is reading comprehension.

### Participative Decision Making

This district has established a well defined and comprehensive system of governance for professional development. PD leadership teams function at the district and the building level as well as various committees to address operations related to PD and school improvement. Roles and functions for each team and committee are clearly defined and members are provided with written role descriptions for the team or committee they serve on. Every teacher is on a team or committee, reflecting the district philosophy that everyone is responsible for some aspect of the district/building wide school improvement. Information and input flows back and forth from the district level to the building level through communication channels that are established through the team/committee structures.

*Principal : We are really sold on having a building leadership team. Communication is very good.*



The district level PD leadership team includes the superintendent, all building principals, the curriculum director, teacher representatives from each building leadership team, representatives from the operational committees, and an AEA representative. The role of district leadership team is to define district goals and set the focus for PD. This team meets monthly for half a day. The district level leadership team focuses on district-wide issues and any PD decisions or actions that involve the school board. An example of a district wide issue

addressed by this group was how to make the best use of the additional day of staff development (as per state legislation). One activity used to help the district PD team recognize a common purpose was reading and discussing *Professional Learning Communities* by Richard DuFour. This activity was designed to help the team articulate their commitment to school improvement and identify issues for future discussion. The book group was not intended to be the content of professional development or a focus of the PD initiative.

The elementary building leadership team is made up of 8 members: the elementary principal, six teachers and the AEA consultant (Sara ~). The building leadership team (BLT) at the Middle School/High School is made up of the principal, two AEA consultants (Anita ~ and Lisa ~), and eight classroom teachers. The Director of Curriculum/Instruction is an adhoc member of both teams. Both of the BLTs conduct meetings bi-monthly and time is regularly scheduled for these meetings during early dismissal and after school. Meetings typically last for about one to two

hours. The Building Leadership Team leads the planning for school improvement at the building level. Decisions made by the team include identifying appropriate content and research base, designing the formative data collection plan, and organizing collaborative teams. This team plans PD sessions in conjunction with trainers and teachers based upon data collection and analysis and needs of staff and student.

In addition to the district and building level teams, the district maintains five other groups that support the operation of PD and school improvement:

- *Data and Assessment Team:* This group identifies usable sources of data, analyzes data for patterns and trends, and helps in the selection of practical assessments.
- *Mapping Team:* This team assists in planning curriculum mapping activities.
- *Professional Development and Research Team:* Members work on finding research based strategies to match the district and building student data and plans PD to match the priorities established. Team members may also help deliver PD, explain the theory behind the strategies, and provide demonstrations.
- *Implementation Team:* This team reviews logs from meetings and disseminates the analysis to the building leadership team. Their role is to use findings from the implementation data to make recommendations regarding the need for additional training.
- *Collaboration:* Members assist in scheduling times for observations, keep track of the frequency of observations made, and review collaborative team meeting minutes.

### Simultaneity

There is thoughtful alignment of the district, building, and individual teacher career development plans (ITCDP) and each career teacher has an individual plan. Principals are expected to meet with teachers 2-3 times a year to discuss progress on the goal(s) identified in the ITCDP.

*The district has made consistent growth in this area (simultaneity). Previously they were involved in many initiatives and now their efforts are more focused toward reading.*

The Woodward Granger School district appears to have an earnest commitment to school improvement and a long history of directing human and fiscal resources toward increasing student learning. There are multiple initiatives in place, some are new, some are continuing, and others are in the process of being completed or phased out. To outside observers, this appears to be a lot for both administration and faculty to manage. Grant funded projects seem to add to complexity of initiatives. For example, the district maintains grant funded projects in science writing, High Schools That Work (final year), and Making Middle Schools Work (second year). The district is engaged as a pilot in the Instructional Decision Making model, and recently was selected to participate in the Iowa High Schools Project. While this zeal to adopt best practices is impressive, it may contribute to fragmentation of efforts. For initiatives to get the intended result, fidelity to the design is critical. The challenge for this district may be to eliminate some projects that may not have yielded the intended results or that have become initiatives that compete for time with the most important priorities.

The teacher evaluation processes and the professional development functions within the district appear to be well aligned. Principals and teachers seem to be comfortable with collecting data that support professional development and documents effective practice as identified in the Iowa Teaching Standards.

Interviews suggest that this district has strong norms around supporting students who are struggling. Interviews suggest that there are established systems-level supports to identify those students who are not doing well, find supports, communicate with families, and solve problems.

## Leadership

School administrators actively support professional development. Principals conduct walkthroughs about twice a month. Principals conduct brief observations in the classroom, recording what they notice on a protocol that lists general areas (i.e., level of student engagement, strategy used, display of student work, assessment, etc.), indicators of best practices, and comments. Principals participate in PD leadership team meetings at the district and building level. In addition to the brief walk-throughs, principals are also expected to conduct observations four times for the purposes of studying implementation (not performance review). Principals also sit in on collaborative team meetings and help facilitate as needed.

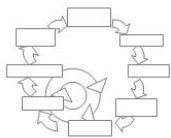


As the Director of Curriculum/Instruction, Pam – plays an active role in developing PD structure and supporting the ongoing governance of the various teams and committees. She observes teachers as they implement strategies, conducts walkthroughs, and routinely attends collaborative team meeting. Pam also seeks out external technical assistance and resources to design and support the PD efforts of the district.

Sara ~, AEA school psychologist and Anita ~, school improvement consultant from AEA 11 serve as PD providers and assist the Woodward Granger School District in planning and delivering professional development. The AEA consultants assist in the collection and analysis of data and in finding SBR strategies. On a request basis consultants will observe in classrooms to support teacher learning, provide demonstrations, and assist with collecting student data.

The leadership team has well written building level plans that articulate the focus of professional development and clearly states the PD target and content to be studied for this year. Their plan also includes content to be considered for the next school year, demonstrating that this team is very intentional about making decisions about content to be studied over time.

## C. The Professional Development Cycle



### Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

The whole faculty studies ITED data twice a year using a process that examines the data for every student. The data are used to make decisions about instructional supports for students. As described in the operating principles section, there is a team that has the specific function of organizing and studying data to be used by the building and district PD teams as they plan for professional development. For example, data were used to determine which secondary students would benefit from Second Chance Reading.

### Goal Setting

*The district is fortunate to have the support from the school board and community for professional development with early dismissals most Wednesdays.*

Leadership teams are committed to using data to make decisions and set goals. The district and building plans for PD clearly state the targets for PD. The PD target for grades 6-12 is reading comprehension.

### Selecting Content

Participants in the interviews stated that setting goals and using data was not a challenge to this district, but the selection of research based content proved to be more challenging.

The written plan describes their approach for gradually adding new strategies, “Each grade level or cluster of grade levels will focus on one SBR strategy at one time with students. As we are certain that implementation is true to the model and consistently done, we will then move to the next chosen strategy.”

The PD Content selected for Woodward-Granger schools is described below.

**Elementary:** Emphasis is on fluency for K-2 and comprehension for 3, 4, and 5. Professional Development began with Readers Theatre while working on becoming familiar with PD routines and procedures (collecting logs, collaborative meetings etc.) Once teachers acquire skills with Readers Theatre and routines are in place, the plan is to add the implementation of think alouds, graphic organizers, Question Answer Relationships (QAR), paired reading, and Venn diagrams. Special education teachers focus on phonemic awareness and selected reading strategies as appropriate for individual students. Elementary content includes:

- Comprehension for grades K-2: Think Aloud and Venn Diagrams.
- Comprehension for grades 3-5: QAR’s
- Decoding for grades K, 1 and Special Ed: Ladders to Literacy
- Phonemic Awareness for grades K-1: initial sounds, sound segmenting
- Vocabulary for grades 2-5: Mnemonics

In the past, district personnel has attended AEA 11 Content Area Capacity (CAB) training which follows a train the trainer design, with LEA personnel attending the CAB training and returning to their building to teach other teachers how to use the strategy. Now the district is using their own staff to deliver the training. CAB trainers base their content on the Reading First strategies.

Guided reading practices are mentioned by teachers and were noticed in observations.

**Middle School/High School:** The PD target is reading comprehension. PD began with text structure and QAR, discussion, and think alouds. Summarization and reciprocal teaching will be added as teachers become skillful with strategies.

### Designing Process for Professional Development

Woodward Granger has built in time for training and collaboration and the district’s professional development design demonstrates the support for intensive PD. They have been thorough in developing and disseminating their PD calendar. The PD design provides time for teachers to learn about the Building PD plan, the Individual Career Development Plan, and the processes for staff to use as they implement the Building Plan.

*Teachers are enthusiastic on having teachers provide the training.*



Teachers are provided with one day per month (except for December) for training time and monthly early release days.

**Elementary:**

- 1 early dismissal PD days and one full day of pre-service are committed to learning about the Building PD Plan, Individual Teacher plans, etc.
- 11 of the 19 early dismissal days will be training on reading strategies

**Middle School/High School**

- 1 early dismissal PD days and one full day of pre-service are committed to learning about the Building PD Plan, Individual Teacher plans, etc.
- 14 out of 20 early dismissal days will be training on reading strategies

**On-Going Cycle**

**Training and Learning Opportunities** The training for both buildings is provided by AEA consultants and teachers on the faculty that are prepared as trainers. For example, at the elementary building a team of teachers is prepared to deliver training by Heartland AEA Content Area Base (CAB) seminar. This team delivers training to the remainder of the staff, providing theory and demonstrations. AEA consultants assist with the delivery of training by providing theory and demonstrations. At the Middle/High School two teachers are fully trained in CRISS, and they train other teachers. The AEA school improvement consultant also delivers training to secondary teachers.

**Collaboration and Implementation** This district has established clear expectations that teachers fully engage in collaborative work and implement the practices being learned in training. Procedures for collaboration and implementation are explicit, and a variety of well developed forms and record keeping tools help teachers and administrators to be organized and accountable for how they use their time. (See appendix for sample forms.)

*Collaboration was a struggle at first, due to scheduling issues, but now they are solved and collaboration is going well.*

Participants in the interviews said that finding time for collaboration has been a challenge, but the administration and PD leadership teams have engaged in ongoing problem solving to create schedules and routines to make time available for PD. Collaborative teams meet by grade levels on a weekly basis during shared planning time. Each teacher participates on a team. Teams also meet during professional development days, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month. Collaborative teams plan lessons together, and collect and analyze data. The collaborative teams send the data and their analysis on to the building level teams to be used in planning and decision making.

During the visit to Woodward Granger, a collaborative team meeting of first grade teachers was observed. This meeting was facilitated by one of the teachers and a written agenda was followed. The teachers discussed assessment procedures and resources for future lessons using the Readers Theatre strategy. Teacher dialogue revealed a commitment to seeing how fast they can move the students.

All teachers complete and submit implementation logs of strategies. The BLT uses the logs to check how often the teachers are applying the strategies in the classroom (frequency). Walk-throughs provide information on fidelity.

An important aspect of the collaborative structures in place in Woodward Granger is teacher observations. Teachers observe another teacher applying the strategy with his/her students to learn more about the strategies. The teacher providing the demonstration is helping to coach the teacher who is observing. As schedules permit, teachers observe another classroom about 3 times a year. To make this observation a well planned learning experience and to build in some accountability, teachers are asked to record what they learned on an observation form. (This process is not related to the observations conducted as part of the performance review, rather it is part of a peer coaching experience.) At the High School, one Friday a month is provided for observations.

### **Formative Data Collection**

Pam Armstrong Vogel and others who were interviewed suggested that setting up formative measures has been somewhat challenging. Currently their formative data collection procedures include the following reading measures:

- Criterion Referenced Tests – Grades 2-6, 8 and 11 (fall and spring)
- DIBELS – Grades K, 1, 2
- Comprehension Question Checklist (aligned with grade level benchmarks for guided reading books) – Grades K-5
- Gates McGinitie – Grades 1 and 2 (3 times a year)
- Follow the Leader (FTL) reading and math – Grades 3-8 and HS Special
- Running records, 1-minute fluency measures – Elementary
- Jamestown Reader (fluency) – Second Chance Reading Classes
- Success Maker Computer Program – Title 1 and special education

On a monthly basis during a collaborative team meeting, the *Formative Data Recording Sheet* is completed. Annually, in September, a committee reviews the formative procedures to look for alignment.

### **Summative Data**

As per state policy, the ITBS and ITED are used for summative evaluation. The teams at Woodward Granger examine scores for grades 3-11. This year the staff will be considering teaching implementation data as part of the summative analysis.

### **External Technical Assistance**

Woodward Granger actively pursues external expertise. AEA 11 consultants (School Improvement, Special Education, CAB trainers, etc.) are key providers of support for professional development and school improvement efforts. Interviews indicate that other presenters/trainers have provided training and/or technical assistance (the science writing grant).

## **D. Some Site Visit Observations**

The Woodward Granger School district has followed a deliberate plan for building a system of professional development that addresses each component of the Iowa Professional Development Model. An apparent strength of the district is using multiple sources of data to determine priorities and engaging the staff in the use of data. The district has carefully developed governance structures and well established collaborative processes. The teachers interviewed seem very positive about the learning opportunities provided to them during training and in collaborative meetings.

The district level and building level teams have worked hard to solve problems and address barriers. An area they may wish to address in the future to continue to refine their PD initiative is that of simultaneity. It appears that there are multiple initiatives operating at the same time. During interviews, district efforts to phase out or complete some priorities were described. Ongoing attention to what can be accomplished with available time and resources and selection of priorities that have the greatest likelihood of impacting student achievement will help this district to focus their efforts.

Another area of improvement identified by the district staff was the need to plan differentiated PD. A goal of planners is to design training that helps content area teachers (PE, music and art, etc.) adapt strategies to fit their content area.